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MISSIONARY STORIES No. 26

The Story of an African Slave Boy.

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Story of an African Slave Boy.

I DO not belong to this country, Madagascar, but am like the white people, a *vazaha* (*i.e.*, a foreigner), for was I not brought from beyond the sea, stolen away from my happy home, and sold into slavery?

This is how it happened that I came to be a slave. I was living with my father and mother and my two brothers, who were both older than me, in the interior of Africa. Our house was made of the branches of palm trees; it was so nice and cool during the hot days, and very comfortable at night; it stood in a large garden, which my father planted with all sorts of things good to eat. We had maize, sweet potatoes, yams, and other vegetables, and a short distance off a grove of banana trees. My father kept some goats and fowls, which my brothers had to feed and look after. We were very happy indeed; it was so nice at night, after our father had finished his work in the garden and mother had gathered some vegetables, to sit around the fire and watch the vegetables cooking and the milk and maize boiling for supper. Sometimes at night we could hear the growls of a lion or other animals prowling round the garden fence; they could not get through, for the fence was made of prickly pear, which grew very high, and which would keep back any lion. But I was often afraid, and would hide my face in my mother's breast; but she told me not to fear, for was not the father a mighty hunter, and had he not killed a lion a little time since, whose skin I now slept on at night? Then I would boast about not being afraid, and would tell my brothers what a mighty hunter I should become some day when I grew as tall as my father's bow when unstrung.

Sometimes a friend would come to see my father and remain a few days; then we would hear all the news. One

day a man came who had been to the coast, and he told us a man who was white was travelling about the country, and intended visiting the town of our chief, some distance away. We were very much amused at this, and thought what a curious creature he must be; we thought perhaps he painted his face, but our friend said he was white all over. My father said he would like to see this wonderful man, and when he came to the town he would get his brother to take care of the house and the children and go to see him. One day my uncle came to pay us a visit, and he told my father that there were men travelling about who would give three or four yards of calico, or a hoe, for a boy or girl, to take them away for slaves. We heard also that some children playing near the forest had been lost and never seen again by their parents; but one man had come from the coast and had hidden himself in the grass as a party of Arabs passed by, and among the people who were following were the children who had been lost. Then our mother was very much afraid, and would scarcely let us go out of her sight; she forbade us to go outside the fence, lest we should be carried away too.

Once our father went away, and soon after we heard strange noises which frightened us very much (I have found out since the noise was made by guns being fired off); we could see on a hill some distance off a village on fire. Then our mother took us quickly into a wood near and hid us in a hole, where the water had washed away the earth from between some large stones. Here we remained some time until we were very hungry, for we had eaten all the food we had brought. Mother told us to be quite quiet and she would go to the house and see if all was safe; she soon came back bringing some eggs with her, which we were very glad to eat, and told us we might go home, which we did. Father came home during the day; he had a wound in his leg made by a spear; it was very painful, and he could not sleep, so mother went to the forest and found some leaves which she pounded

A market in Central Africa.

to pieces between two stones and then placed on his leg, which made it get well quickly. Father told us that our chief had some time before made war on another chief, whose village was on the other side of the river, because when he was hunting hippopotamus one day in the river the body of one which had been killed was lost, but had been washed up near the other village. The people would not give it back; they had a big feast and ate it all. Our chief was very angry, so he called his fighting men together and went at night and attacked the village; they killed several men, and brought back seven cows with them. The other chief called his men together to attack our village, but they were afraid, because our men were all mighty fighting men, so he sent to some Arabs who had a camp two or three days off to come and help him, and because they had guns they were able to beat our chief and carry his wives and children away. They also took everything they could find in the village. Father was wounded at the beginning, and hid himself until the fight was over; after the Arabs had gone he returned home. The Arabs did not seek for the houses away on the plantations, because the brother of our chief, who lived in a larger village further up the river, brought his warriors to fight them, so they left and crossed over, taking many captives and elephant tusks. When they got to the village the other chief wanted all the captives for himself, but the Arabs would not let him have them, so they quarrelled. Then the Arabs killed the chief and his men, and took the women and children away.

Our chief soon began to build his village again, and because so many men had been killed he told father to move into the new village, and made him one of his head-men. But we had not been there very long before mother was taken sick. The medicine men could not cure her, although all the people in the village were called to clap their hands and shout to drive the evil spirit away. They did this for four days without stopping, but she died, and we buried her in the forest. How

lonely I was then! My father was very good, but he had to be away with our chief: we did not see him often.

One day our father told us that the white man about whom we had heard was at a village about two days off, and that our chief was going to visit him. As he was a great medicine man, the chief hoped he might be able to get his wife and children returned. Father was ordered to go too, so he asked my uncle to look after us children and the house. This he promised to do, and came to sleep in our house. There were a lot of children in our village, and I had several particular friends. One day there were three of us playing on the banks of the river—we were making mud cows and goats; then we dried them in the sun and called them our cattle. I used to like playing near the river, because there were so many nice things there—plenty of birds. One of them had long legs and a very little body; they were very curious; we never hurt them, because they were "fady"—that is, consecrated to the god of our village. We used to make little ponds and place in them little black frogs with feet of a bright scarlet colour, but we had to keep a look-out for fear the crocodiles should come out of the water and attack us. Some women had been eaten some time before, so our chief had the place fenced round some way out in the water. There was not much danger, but we had to be cautious.

Whilst we were playing there my uncle came and sat down on the bank and told us about the beautiful things he had seen in the forest. Then he asked us if we would like to go with him and get some wild honey. The two other boys were delighted to go, and I, being the youngest, was pleased also. We had never been any distance into the forest, because we were afraid of the wild beasts and snakes, but my uncle promised to take care of us. Well, we started, and at first went into a wood which we thought would be a good place for honey, but my uncle said he knew a hollow tree where there was a large quantity, so we went; it was a long way, and I

began to get tired. The other boys were tired also, and said they would go no further, but he told them it was only a short distance ahead. When we got over a small hill the boys refused to go any further ; then my uncle got cross and tried to catch them, but they ran away the same road we had come. When I found I was alone I began to cry, for I was afraid of the darkness of the forest, but my uncle soon returned, and, asking me if I wanted some food, gave me a piece of cassava ; then we went on again. When I got tired he carried me. At night we slept among some rocks, and in the morning went on again until we came to a place where there were many people ; some of them had chains on their hands, some large forked pieces of wood fastened to their necks, others were fastened in rows with their feet through holes in a long piece of wood which prevented them from moving. This place was the Arab camp.

One of them came to my uncle and asked what he wanted, and he said he had brought me for sale. I was too frightened to speak. The Arab was dressed in a long white dress that came down below the knees, and a waistcoat with a lot of gold embroidery; he also wore a red cap with a black tassel; he had a long knife at his side, and carried a gun in his hand. He looked at me and asked my price. My uncle asked in exchange a gun like the one he carried. The Arab laughed at this, and offered two yards of blue cloth and one yard of white, but my uncle would not agree, and said he would take me back again. Two other Arabs then came up and began to question me, and I told them about what my uncle had done in bringing me away, begging to be taken back to my father. When they heard what I said, they told my uncle he had stolen me, and that they should keep me and himself too. Then he jumped up quickly and ran away I wanted to go too, but one of the Arabs held me—the others followed my uncle. I heard some guns fired, but I don't know what became of him. The two Arabs came back alone ; then they took me into a yard around

which were many huts. Here were a number of women and children. I found the wife of our chief and her children; she asked me many questions about her husband. I understood the Arabs were waiting in this place until he should bring other slaves to redeem her! We remained here about four weeks.

I soon grew accustomed to my new life. The chief of the Arabs was an old man; he took a great fancy to me, and often allowed me to sit in his hut, and taught me some of his language. No ransom came for the chief's wife, so it was decided to begin our journey. There was a great bustle; all the men were collected from the different yards and chained together; large forked sticks were put on their necks, so that they could only just move. Some of the men were only chained; these had to carry the tents and other baggage as well as the food for the journey. After the men came the women and children; the women were only chained. We were well guarded by Arabs, who carried long guns and knives. When we children were tired of walking, the Arabs would make the men carry us on their shoulders. The drivers carried long whips made of hide, which they used freely on the naked backs of the men; it would cut the flesh open. We were a long time on the way, for we went very slowly, so as not to tire the slaves too much. Every four or five days we remained a day to rest.

At one of these resting-places our chief's wife became very ill. An Arab came and took off her chain, telling her to go outside the camp; she never came back. I missed her very much; she had been kind to me. One day we came to a river; it was not very wide—it looked deep. On the water grew beautiful blue lilies and some yellow flowers. The Arabs stopped the men and held a consultation. I don't know what it was about, but they seemed afraid to cross the water. They took long sticks and beat the water, breaking to pieces the beautiful flowers. Some of the slaves said they were afraid of the water-god, but others said it was the crocodiles they feared.

They at last seemed satisfied, and the men began to wade through. The water began to rise until it reached about the breasts of the men; then it got shallow again. When about half the gang had crossed, we heard a most dreadful scream, and found a crocodile had seized one of the men and had dragged him under water. There was great confusion, because they were chained! two or three men in front and behind were struggling in the water; they could not be released. It was not until several of them had ceased to move that the living were extracted from the gang. The Arabs were much frightened, and kept firing off their guns; at last one brought an axe and cut the chain in two. The Arabs seemed to care very little about the death of these men. We who were following were too much alarmed to cross the water, so a camp was formed on the other side of the stream, and we marched further up the river, where it was narrow. The Arabs made some of the men chop down a few of the trees, over which we safely crossed and got to the camp. We remained in this camp several days, where we were joined by another party of Arabs, who brought more slaves with them and much ivory.

At this camp one of the Arabs died, so he was buried: they dug a hole and wrapped a cloth round the body, and put it into the hole, placing some heavy stones on the top to keep the wild beasts away. We then went on a few days further and came to a wide river, where we heard the party were to be divided, so about a hundred men and women went off with several Arabs, among whom was my old friend. I was sorry when he went, because the Arab who now took command was very cruel; for the least thing he would strike us with a piece of hide until the blood ran from the wound. One day we marched through some long, sharp grass, which wounded our legs and feet like lances. Two women and a man were so wounded they could not walk; he was very angry, and beat them very much; at last he came and took them from the chain and killed them with a hatchet.

A stone-shuffling game.

A woman had a little baby which cried very much during the night, as it was ill. The other women were very cross, and grumbled at her for not keeping the baby quiet; they told the driver they were unable to get any sleep. During the morning the baby still cried a good deal; then the head-man came up and snatched the child out of its mother's arms, and threw it into the thick black mud of a bog we were passing. The baby was soon dead. The mother was distracted, and screamed out, trying to rescue her baby. The driver slashed her with his whip, and the other women laughed, so brutal had they become. The mother became quite quiet, but when she was loosened at night she caught up a tent-pole and struck the head-man a blow on the head which rendered him quite insensible. There was a great confusion. He soon came to again; then he caused all the slaves to be brought near, and, after having had her beaten till the blood poured down, he shot her dead. Turning to the slaves he told them they would be treated in the same manner if they dared disobey him.

A few days after this we came in sight of the sea. We were all much astonished, and when our drivers came and told us that we were to be sent over that water, we were terribly frightened; some of the grown-up people said they would rather die than be taken over. We marched on again, and soon came to the sea-shore, where we were put into a large compound, which was strongly fenced with pointed wooden stakes and a high hedge of prickly pear outside. This compound was divided by a strong fence; the men were placed on one side, the women on the other. We remained here several weeks, and were kindly treated by the Arabs, who gave us plenty of food. During the evenings, when the moon shone brightly, we used to get up dances and other games, and, as no one was chained, we could all join in. One day we were much astonished to see something coming over the water. At first we thought it was a large bird, but our guards told us it was a ship, which would carry us away to other lands. It grieved us very much,

and some of the men tried to escape ; but the place was too strongly guarded, so we could do nothing but watch. We saw another ship come. They had brought a cargo of rice, and were to take away slaves in return. Some of us were to be sent to Zanzibar, some to Madagascar. It was raining the day we were sent on board the ship, and we felt very miserable.

When we were all standing on the beach, ready to be put on board the boats, some of the men said they would not go. There was a great noise, but the Arabs came and beat the people, and put some in much heavier chains. There was one man who came from my village ; he, with several more, could not be persuaded to get into the boat. They took up stones and fought the Arabs, but the Arabs overpowered them and speared them to death ; there were seven killed that morning. I was placed on the ship going to Madagascar. The ship was small and very crowded, and, as we were down below, it got so hot we could scarcely breathe. We were all so ill ; some of the people died, and every morning their bodies were thrown into the sea. After we were fairly out to sea, most of the boys and girls were allowed to come on deck. I think we should all have died had it not been so.

One morning the sailor who was keeping watch came to the captain and told him that in the far distance he could see something that looked like smoke, and that he thought it was a war ship. The captain called all the sailors together and talked very earnestly with them. I had picked up some of their language whilst travelling with the Arabs, so I could make out a little what they were talking about. He asked them what had better be done in case it should be a war-ship. Some proposed one thing, some another ; one man wished all the slaves to be thrown overboard, but that was not allowed. I was very frightened, especially when one of the men called me, and, pointing to the smoke, said, "In that ship are white men who eat black people ; the smoke you see is from the fire on which they are cooking children. Now go down and tell all

the rest what you have seen." I went down, and, I am afraid, enlarged upon the story so much that in a short time all the slaves were howling with fear. Presently one of the sailors came down and told us the same story; he also told us the people on the smoke-ship had seen us, and that they were sailing after us. Whilst he spoke we heard a dreadful sound; some of the men said it was like a lion's roar when he was in a bad temper, only louder, but the sailor said it was the white man roaring because he could smell his prey. Then he called fifteen of the smaller boys and girls, of whom I was one, and told us to creep through a hole in the floor and lie down between the ribs of the ship and hide there, and be sure not to speak, or the white men would find us. This we did, but it was dark and full of wet sand. We were too much alarmed to speak. Soon we heard a boat come alongside our ship. People were speaking in a language we could not understand, but after a time they took our captain away with them and all the slaves, who made a great noise, for they thought they were all to be cooked and eaten. We remained quite still until the sailor who had placed us here brought some rice; he said we must remain where we were, as the white men had not left the ship; they were going to take it to land, take out all the cargo of tusks, and burn the ship.

A storm came on during the night. I thought I should have died, for in the rolling a lot of water came down; this kept washing over us. Presently it got quieter, and directly after we heard a very curious noise. We could not tell at first what it was, but we found it was only the anchor let down; then we were quite quiet. After we had been asleep some time someone awoke us and told us to be very quiet and follow him. This we did; we were placed in a boat, and soon after we found ourselves on shore. How glad we were! We began to shout and laugh, but our guide told us to be quiet, or we should be taken again. It was quite dark, but I could see we were taken through a town, for there were many

African native huts.

houses. Now and then we were spoken to by some men, but I could not understand what they said. A lot of men were sitting round a gateway and crying out every now and then, "Zovy, zovy," and beating together a pair of bones of oxen. Afterwards I found these were guards of the governor's house. After we had walked some distance we came to a large house; we were given a good meal and told to sleep, which we were glad enough to do. The people here were very kind to us; they gave us plenty of rice and beef, with bananas and yams. We could not understand the language. Afterwards I learned it, and found that this place was called Majunga, and that we were in the island of Madagascar. A number of people came to see us, and day by day one or two would be taken and sold. One day a man came and looked at me, and talked for a long time to my master; then the latter told me that I had been sold, and that I must be a good boy and do what my new master told me to do; he then gave me a piece of silver money, about as big as a grain of maize, and sent me away.

I followed my new master to a place where there were many houses in a compound with strong walls; it was the fort. My master was a relation of the governor of the town. He and his wife were about to start for a long journey into the country. I had been bought to attend them on the way, and be a companion to their son, who was about my own age. They were good to me, but the son at first used to beat me. But one day I knocked him down; he ran to tell his father, who gave us both a thrashing with his stick; we did not fight any more. I saw my mistress one day sitting in her room talking to something in her hand. I thought it was her god, and did not care to go near it; she took good care of it, wrapping it in cloth and placing it in a box when she had finished. My mistress had been nursed by a Makoa woman, so she knew a good deal of my language, and used to talk to me, but I soon got to learn Malagasy. After I had been with

these people about a month, my master started on his journey to the capital where his queen lived. We travelled in a curious way ; my mistress was carried in a sort of light basket made of white leather beautifully woven, and slung on poles ; this palanquin was carried by four men at a time. My master's palanquin was different, being a sort of chair, also having long poles by which it was carried. We took tents with us, and at night, when we came to a nice place, we spread them and remained there. We passed through a beautiful country, where we saw many oxen, but no deer or other animals like there were in my country. We crossed some rivers, where I saw a lot of crocodiles, but no hippopotamus ; there were no lions or other fierce animals. We went on for several days, and then we remained for a day.

On this day my master would talk to the people in a loud voice, and then they would all sing, and each of them had what I thought was a little god in his hand, like the one I saw in my mistress's hand, which she kept in a tin box. One day, after they had finished their singing, my mistress called me, and told me to take her god and put it into the box. I refused to do so, and would not touch it. I was afraid of her "sampy," as they called their gods ; she seemed amused, but told me it was not her "sampy," but a book in which the Word of her God was written ; she showed it to me, and I saw a lot of black marks all over it ; she read some of it to me, and told me I should be taught to read it when we got to our journey's end. We were a long time on the way, but at last we came in sight of a mountain on which were built a great number of houses. Quite on the top was a very large stone house with towers. From one of the towers a white flag, with one corner red, flew from a staff. My master was very glad when he saw this town ; he told us the house we could see was where the queen lived.

Next day we arrived in the capital of Madagascar, called Antananarivo. I remained with my good master and mistress for some years, and always found them kind. I was sent to

school with their children, where I got on very well indeed. The white teacher said some day I should become a school-teacher. One evening when I came home from school I found my master and all his friends assembled; they told me that I was no longer a slave, and that I could now go anywhere I liked. The queen had that day given freedom to all the Makoa slaves in her country; it had been brought about by the English people who lived here and pitied the poor slaves, who were sold like animals in the "Zoma" market. You perhaps may think that I was very glad that I was no longer a slave, but it was not so. I had now lost those who had been as father and mother to me, and had no home or relations.

I was no longer afraid of the white people; they do not eat people, as the Arabs said, so I went to one of them and asked for work; he gave it me. I go to school every day, and then work a little in the house; in a few years' time the Bishop will send me to teach for him in a village far away, where I hope to be able to bring many people, not to believe in "sampys," but in the true God Who has been so good to me, a poor African slave-boy.

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The above Story was told by the slave-boy to the Rev. J. Coles, Missionary of Antananarivo.

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